

Long Live the King

By MARY ROBERTS RINEHART

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HEDWIG IS OFFERED AS A SACRIFICE TO SAVE THE TOTTERING KINGDOM OF LIVONIA.

Synopsis.—The crown prince of Livonia, Ferdinand William Otto, ten years old, taken to the opera by his aunt, tires of the singing and slips away to the park, where he makes the acquaintance of Bobby Thorpe, a little American boy. Returning to the palace at night, he finds everything in an uproar as a result of the search which has been made for him. The same night the chancellor calls to consult the boy's grandfather, the old king, who is very ill. The chancellor suggests that to preserve the kingdom, the friendship of the neighboring kingdom of Karna be secured by giving the Princess Hedwig in marriage to King Karl of that country. Countess Loesche, lady-in-waiting to Princess Annuncata, Hedwig's mother, is in love with King Karl and plots to prevent his marriage to Hedwig. Hedwig, who loves Nikky Larisch, Otto's aide de camp, is dismayed when told of the plans for her marriage. Countess Loesche sends a secret message to King Karl. The messenger is attacked by agents of the terrorists and a dummy letter substituted. Captain Larisch, unaware of the substitution, holds up Karl's chauffeur and secures the envelope. The captain impersonates Karl's chauffeur and exchanges the sheet within the envelope for some cigarette papers. On delivering the envelope to Karl, Larisch is made prisoner when the deception is discovered.

CHAPTER VII.—Continued.

The archduchess was terrified. She had known that there was disaffection about. She knew that in the last few years precautions at the palace had been increased. Sentries were doubled. Men in the uniforms of lackeys, but doing no labor, were everywhere. But with time and safety she had felt secure.

"Of course," the king resumed, "things are not as bad as that paper indicates. It is the voice of the few, rather than the many. Still, it is a voice."

Annuncata looked more than her age now. She glanced around the room



"I Will Go Myself."

as though, already, she heard the mob at the doors.

"To return to the matter of Hedwig's marriage," said the king. "I—"

"Marriage! When our very lives are threatened!"

"I would be greatly honored," said the king, "if I might be permitted to finish what I was saying."

She had the grace to flush.

"Under the circumstances," the king resumed, "Hedwig's marriage takes on great significance—great political significance."

For a half-hour then, he talked to her. More than for years, he unbowed himself. He had tried. His ministers had tried. Taxes had been lightened; the representation of the people increased, until, as he said, he was only nominally a ruler. But discontent remained. Some who had gone to America and returned with savings enough to set themselves up in business, had brought back with them the American idea.

Annuncata listened to the end. She felt no pity for those who would better themselves by discontent and its product, revolt. She felt only resentment, that her peace was being threatened, her position assailed. And in her resentment she included the king himself. He should have done better.

And something of this she did not hesitate to say. "Karna is quiet enough," she finished, a final thrust.

"Karna is better off. A lowland, most of it, and fertile." But a spot of color showed in his old cheeks. "I am glad you spoke of Karna. What- ever plans we make, Karna must be considered."

"Why? Karna does not consider us."

He raised his hand. "You are wrong. Just now, Karna is doing us the honor of making an alliance with us. A matrimonial alliance."

The archduchess was, hardly surprised, as one may believe. But she was not minded to yield too easily. The old resentment against her father

flamed. Indifferent mother though she was, she made capital of a fear for Hedwig's happiness.

At last she succeeded in irritating the king—a more difficult thing now than in earlier times, but not so hard a matter at that. He listened quietly until she had finished, and then sent her away. When she had got part way to the door, however, he called her back. And since a king is a king, even if he is one's father and very old, she came.

"Just one word more," he said, in his thin, old, high-bred voice. "Much of your unhappiness was of your own making. You, and you only, know how much. But nothing that you have said can change the situation. I am merely compelled to make the decision alone, and soon. I have not much time."

So, after all, was the matter of the Duchess Hedwig's marriage arranged, a composite outgrowth of expediency and obstinacy, of defiance and anger. And so it was hastened.

Irritation gave the king strength. That afternoon were summoned in haste the members of his council—fat old Friese, young Marschall with the rat face, austere Bayerl with the white skin and burning eyes, and others. And to them all the king disclosed his royal will. There was some demur. But, after all, the king's will was dominant. Friese could but voice his protest and relapse into greasy silence.

The chancellor sat silent during the conclave, silent, but intent. On each speaker he turned his eyes, and waited until at last Karl's proposal, with its promises, was laid before them in full. Then, and only then, the chancellor rose. His speech was short. He told them of what they all knew, their own insecurity. He spoke but a word of the crown prince, but that softly. And he drew for them a picture of the future that set their hearts to glowing—a throne secure, a greater kingdom, freedom from the costs of war, a harbor by the sea.

The battle, which was no battle at all, was won. He had won. The country had won. The crown prince had won. Only Hedwig had lost. And only Mettlich knew just how she had lost.

The necessity for work brought the king the strength to do it. Mettlich remained with him. Boxes were brought from vaults, unlocked and examined. Secretaries came and went. At eight o'clock a frugal dinner was spread in the study, and they ate it almost literally over state documents.

On and on, until midnight or thereabouts. They stopped. The thing was arranged. Nothing was left now but to carry the word to Karl.

Two things were necessary: Haste. The king, having determined it, would lose no time. And dignity. The granddaughter of the king must be offered with ceremony. No ordinary king's messenger, then, but some dignitary of the court.

To this emergency Mettlich rose like the doughty old warrior and statesman that he was. "If you are willing, sire," he said, as he rose, "I will go myself."

"When?"

"Since it must be done, the sooner the better. Tonight, sire."

"To the capital?"

"Not so far. Karl is hunting. He is at Wedling."

He went almost immediately, and the king summoned his valets, and was got to bed. But long after the automobile containing Mettlich and two secret agents was on the road toward the mountains, he tossed on his narrow bed. To what straits had they come indeed! He closed his eyes wearily. Something had gone out of his life. He did not realize at first what it was. When he did, he smiled his old grim smile in the darkness.

He had lost a foe. More than anything, perhaps, he had dearly loved a foe.

CHAPTER VIII.

On the Mountain Road.

The low gray car which carried the chancellor was on its way through the mountains. It moved deliberately, for

two reasons. First, the chancellor was afraid of motors. He had a horseman's hatred and fear of machines. Second, he was not of a mind to rouse King Karl from a night's sleep, even to bring the hand of the Princess Hedwig. His intention was to put up at some inn in a village not far from the lodge and to reach Karl by messenger early in the morning, before the hunters left for the day.

Then, all being prepared duly and in order, Mettlich himself would arrive, and things would go forward with dignity and dispatch.

The valley of the Ar deepened. The cliff rose above them, a wall broken here and there by the offset of narrow ravines, filled with forest trees. There was a pause while the chains on the rear wheels were supplemented by others in front, for there must be no danger of a skid. And another pause, where the road slanted perilously toward the brink of the chasm, and caution dictated that the chancellor alight, and make a hundred feet or so of dangerous curve afoot.

It required diplomacy to get him out. But it was finally done, and his heavy figure, draped in its military cape, went on ahead, outlined by the lamps of the car behind him.

He was well around the curve, and the cliff was broken by a wedge of timber, when a curiously shaped object projected itself over the edge of the bank, and rolling down, lay almost at his feet. The lamps brought it into sharp relief—a man, gagged and tied, and rolled, cigar shaped, in an automobile robe.

The chancellor turned, and called to his men. They bent over the bundle. The others ran up, and cut the bonds. What with cold and long inaction, and his recent drop over the bank, the man could not speak. One of the secret service men had a flask, and held it to his lips. An amazing situation, indeed, increased by the discovery that under the robe he wore only his undergarments, with a soldier's tunic wrapped around his shoulders. They carried him into the car where he lay with head lolling back, and his swollen tongue protruding. Half dead he was, with cold and long anxiety. The brandy cleared his mind long before he could speak, and he saw by the uniforms that he was in the hands of the enemy. He turned sulkily silent then, convinced that he had escaped one death but to meet another. Twenty-four hours now he had faced eternity, and he was ready.

He preferred, however, to die fully clothed, and when, in response to his pointing up the bank and to his inarticulate mouthings, one of the secret police examined the bit of woodland with his pocket flash, he found a pair of trousers where Nikky had left them, neatly folded and hung over the branch of a tree. The brandy being supplemented by hot coffee from a patent bottle, the man revived further, made an effort, and sat up. His tongue was still swollen, but they made out what he said. He had been there since the night before. He was of Karna, and a king's messenger.

"I was coming back from the barrier," he said thickly, "where I had carried dispatches to the officer in charge. On my return a man hailed me from the side of the road, near where you found me. I thought that he desired to be taken on, and stopped my car. But he attacked me. He was armed and I was not. He knocked me senseless, and when I awakened I was

bound as you see me now. I was not hurt, but I was very tired. I thought that I would die, but I was not. I was brought here, and I am now in your hands. I am a messenger of the king, and I am carrying dispatches to the officer in charge. I am very tired, and I am very hungry. I am very thirsty, and I am very cold. I am very warm, and I am very dry. I am very wet, and I am very hot. I am very happy, and I am very sad. I am very angry, and I am very calm. I am very brave, and I am very cowardly. I am very wise, and I am very foolish. I am very kind, and I am very cruel. I am very good, and I am very bad. I am very beautiful, and I am very ugly. I am very strong, and I am very weak. I am very fast, and I am very slow. I am very loud, and I am very quiet. I am very tall, and I am very short. I am very old, and I am very young. I am very rich, and I am very poor. I am very famous, and I am very obscure. I am very loved, and I am very hated. I am very respected, and I am very despised. 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